

Honorable Chair, esteemed delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, thank you for this opportunity to share the reality, in which we work, of excluded populations along the drug trafficking routes in Latin America.

My intervention will focus on item 10 of the fifth chapter of the UNGASS outcome document: “to better understand the extent of adverse impacts [...] of drug trafficking in small quantities in order to develop [...] effective responses to counter micro trafficking;”

Last week when I got the message that I had been selected for this intervention, I found myself in a little village of coffee growers up in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta on Colombia’s northern coast, the world’s highest coastal mountain. This is where the Colombian drug history started. In the 1960s this region lived the *bonanza marimbera* – the marijuana bonanza that deforested 12% of this marvelous national park. A couple of decades later, the coca bush came to replace the marijuana plants, accompanied by horrific violence. But today the region is free from illicit crops and armed groups, and filled with happy farmers providing fruits for the local markets and coffee for the world market. They wanted no more of the problems the drug industry brought them.

An old man in the village has told me a story from those first years of marijuana crops: At night a caravan of up to 1000 mules would descend from the highlands to one of the ports at the foot of the mountain. Heading the caravan was the farmers’ leader, carrying a shotgun, and two bags over his shoulders filled with pesos bills to pay their way through.

This was the early version of *plomo o plata* – led or silver. Today, the drug traffickers apply the same principle to reach the shores and frontiers of Colombia safely with their merchandise. But with way more serious consequences, especially for the young.

Drug trafficking – both in production, transit and consumer countries - invariably results in the spill over-effect. Services are paid for in product, and the drugs end up in the local markets. Also, the drug traffickers sometimes deliberately assist in the conformation of groups of young boys, “gangs”, to distribute their drugs, the so called “micro trafficking”. The reason being, on one hand, to maximize their revenue through national markets, but also to establish a social control in societies of importance to them. It can be major cities that serve as strategic hubs, or small villages along the drug trafficking corridors.

Often the demand in these countries is low and must be created or stimulated, such as giving away drugs for free in the beginning. The scene is then set for these drug-selling street-gangs to protect their territories with violence and maximize the profit from their territorial control by other crimes, such as extortion of the population and small businesses. This criminal control obviously obstructs the development these marginalized and impoverished societies need, and that is of course in the best interest of the drug traffickers.

This micro trafficking and gang problem constitutes one of the worst social problems on the Latin American continent today. Since 2012 the percentage of Brazilian adolescents living in the country’s major cities being murdered, has risen by more than 30%. The number of drug users has

increased by almost 50% in Mexico since 2011. 43 of the world's 50 most violent cities are in Latin America - all of them in cocaine trafficking countries.

The counter measures for avoiding such a development are relatively well understood. Both the OAS report on the drug problem in the Americas and the Colombian peace accord with the FARC guerilla emphasize the importance of creating resilient communities through initiatives such as, to quote the Colombian peace accord, "psychosocial support, self-esteem, conflict resolution, management of free time, strengthening of the family unit, promoting a commitment to education, healthy lifestyles, development of cultural and sporting skills and recreational activities".

However, the drug induced political corruption that is particularly prevalent along the drug trafficking routes often obstructs such public initiatives. Funds are being usurped by politicians and functionaries and anyhow it is not in the interest of the drug traffickers, that often control them, that the living conditions of the excluded population – their cannon fodder – improve.

This leaves an important responsibility with the international development community to help to bring about these changes, a responsibility that in any case should be a shared one when it comes to the global drug problem. And this is the main message of our intervention:

The requirements that the international donor organizations increasingly are asking in terms of specific and measurable outcomes and short-term results and sustainability, are impossible for these excluded and impoverished communities to fulfill. Their level of development is often in such a precarious state that the risks the donor organizations perceive, in relation to their own goals, are way too high. The result is that the excluded communities that are most in need of international support are not receiving it, and instead are falling prey to micro trafficking and gang violence.

We have worked in and studied communities that over many years desperately have solicited support for educational projects and social development, and not received it. The arguments for turning down the applications have typically been of a formalistic character: such as "since there are no formal civil society organizations in the community, there is no civil society to support". A catch 22.

The true reason for the rejections, however, seems to be the impossibility to guarantee positive outcomes and impact from a specific intervention in communities that are so severely underdeveloped, where everything is lacking and that are under heavy pressure from drug traffickers.

The world's development policies must consider that these precarious communities being affected by drug trafficking have special needs. A broader, long term approach is needed to pull them out of the conditions that make them so attractive for criminal actors.

The little village I visited in the Sierra Nevada celebrated the Fiesta of the colonies when I was there last week. The village was founded by refugees from the Colombian civil war in the 1950s

and hundreds of children and adolescents from the village and the surrounding farms filled the streets in a lively parade wearing the traditional costumes from the regions their great grandfathers had come from. The parents obviously had been busy for weeks preparing this event for their children. This social cohesion and civic life is a prerequisite for the successful alternative development this community has achieved.

Let it be clear that a similar civic event is utterly – utterly – unimaginable in the impoverished rural and urban communities that are currently being taken over by gangs and micro trafficking. That is precisely why an alternative development for these young people is so hard to achieve and will take a dedicated effort. These communities need the world's urgent attention and assistance.

Thank you.